

Acts 18:1-22: When God Leads, Do You Follow or Question His Direction?

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I. Introduction

Do you ever wonder what to do in any given situation (relationships, parenting, dilemma's at work, etc.)? Do you ever ask God what to do? Whether you asked Him or not, when He gave you the answer, did you follow it or did you just keep doing the same thing? Why do you doubt God's direction? Has He shown Himself trustworthy in your life or not,if not, why not?

II. Acts 18:1-22: When God is Leading You, Do You Follow or Doubt His Direction?

18:1-4, Paul attempted to free the Athenians from their idolatry by introducing them to the true God of the universe, the real source of their life and breath, who had overlooked their idolatry but was now calling them into a personal relationship with Him in order to save them from the judgment to come. Some accepted God's offer of salvation, most didn't. So Paul left Athens (as far as the biblical record is concerned, no church was planted in Athens nor did Paul return there). He went to Corinth which was 50 miles west of Athens. Corinth was destroyed by the Romans in 146 B.C. for joining an anti-Roman revolt. It was rebuilt by Julius Caesar 100 years later and it became a Roman colony and the capital of the Province of Achaea. Its population was about 500,000. It was the epicenter of worship for Aphrodite, the goddess of love. Aphrodite's temple had 1,000 cultic prostitutes and the temple was built on an 1,800 ft. hill above the city. Corinth was considered the most immoral city in the ancient world. Its name became a verb: "to Corinthianize" meant to be thoroughly immoral (a "Corinthian girl" meant a prostitute). One can see why the Corinthians struggled so much with immorality and why Paul later had to write two letters to them.

In Corinth Paul runs into a Jewish couple, Aquila and Priscilla, who provide him a place to live and work as a tentmaker (the word likely means someone who works with various leather goods for military, industrial, and other uses). Aquila was originally from Pontus (he may've been one of the converts during Pentecost, Acts 2:9). But they lived in Rome until 49 A.D. when Claudius Caesar commanded that all Jews be expelled from Rome (Roman historian Suetonius explained why: the Jewish community began to riot over a message about a Messiah, a *Christus*, which caused the same uproar in Antioch, Thessalonica, and elsewhere). Priscilla and Aquila eventually return to Rome (Romans 16:3) after Claudius' death, since such imperial edicts were rescinded after the emperor's death. This couple will become close associates to Paul; they even risked their lives for him (Romans 16:3-4; 1 Corinthians 16:19; 2 Timothy 4:19). How did Paul happen to run into two fellow Christians who could provide him lodging and work who sometime earlier had been kicked out of Rome? This was no chance meeting, the Lord sent Paul there and He knew long before Paul got there what he would need. Having found work (9-5, Mon-Fri) and a place to live, Paul begins to do the real work he was sent there to do: every Saturday he evangelized the Jews and Gentiles in the synagogue. Then Silas and Timothy arrive from Macedonia.

18:5-11, Silas and Timothy bring Paul financial aid from the Philippian church (2 Corinthians 11:9; Philippians 4:14-16). They also bring good news regarding the Thessalonian church whom Paul was worried about (1 Thessalonians 3:1-10) and their questions and concerns about Jesus' future return (2 Thessalonians 2:1-3), all of which prompt Paul to write 1 & 2 Thessalonians from Corinth. The financial aid allowed Paul to leave tent-making and focus solely on bringing more Jews and Gentiles into the Kingdom and disciple them on how to follow Christ.

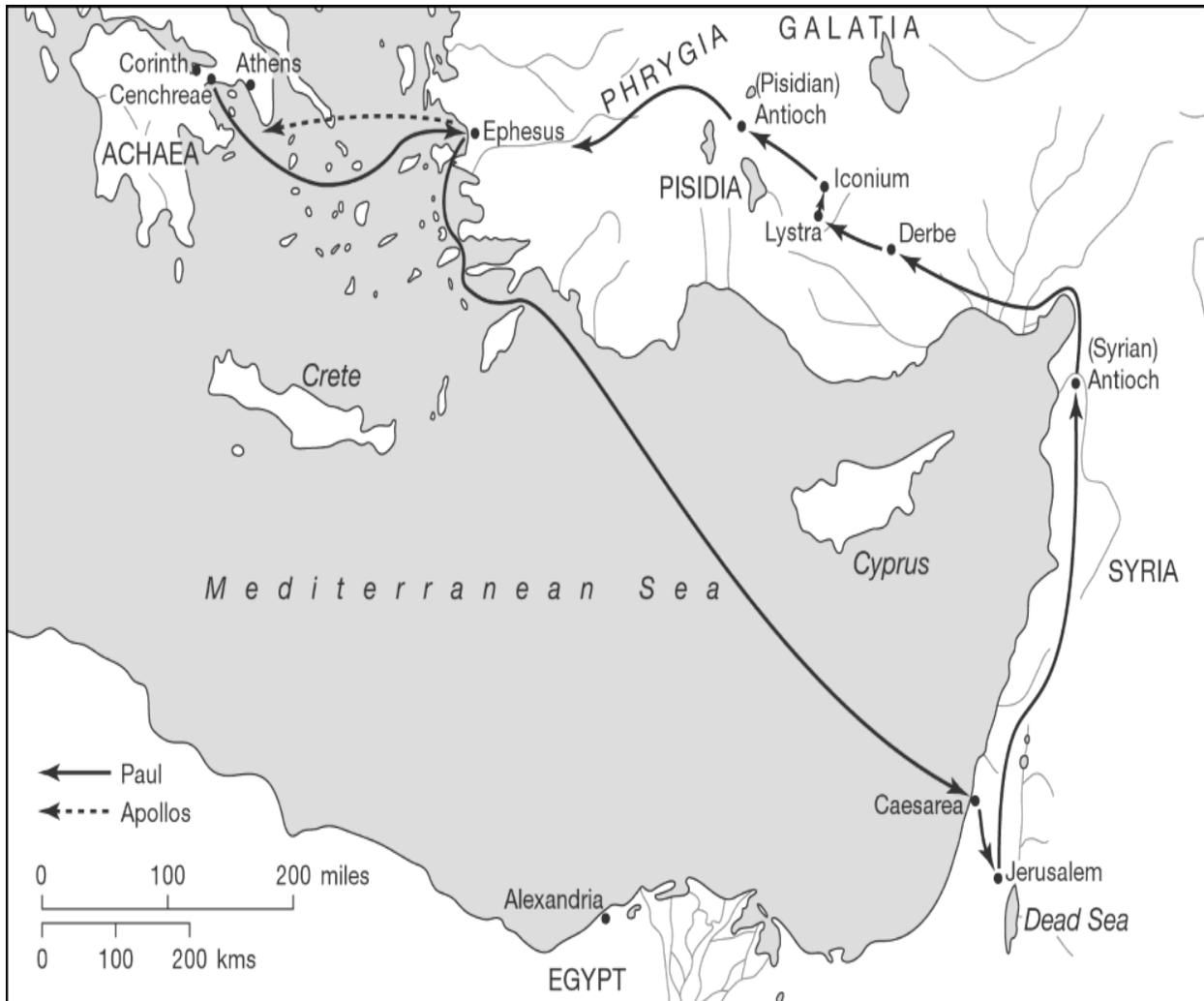
As Paul continued preaching in the synagogue showing them that Jesus was the long-awaited Messiah, the Jews opposed him and blasphemed against Jesus. So in a symbolic act that cleansed Paul of any guilt, he shook his garments and said, "Your blood be upon your own heads; I am clean. From now on I will go to the Gentiles." The Lord told His disciples to do something similar as a judgment against those who refused to repent and believe (Luke 9:5). Paul did his job and warned them; if he hadn't, he would be guilty, but now their blood is on their own heads (cf. Ezekiel 33:1-9). Paul's preaching was not in vain: Justus believed along with many other Gentile Corinthians (some think Justus was a wealthy Roman citizen named Titus Gaius Justus, the same Gaius in 1 Corinthians 1:14 and who later hosted Paul and the church while he was in Corinth, Romans 16:23). The ruler of the synagogue, Crispus, and his entire family also believed.

Next, the Lord does something incredible for Paul; he essentially makes him bulletproof during his stay in Corinth (as He did with Joshua, 1:5). He tells him in a vision not to be afraid but to continue speaking out, that there are many more souls to bring into the Kingdom and that no one will be able to hurt him. So Paul continued for another year and a half in Corinth! Why did Jesus tell Paul not to be afraid? Because Paul, though courageous, was terrified (1 Corinthians 2:3). Why? Well, he's run into this kind of animosity before and one of those times he was left for dead outside the city (Acts 14:9). Not only that, the place he's chosen to hold church is next door to the synagogue and he's taken many of their members, including the leader of the synagogue, so he's expecting violence. But instead the Lord gives him words that strengthen and comfort him. Should Paul trust Him, if so why? Is the Lord's past deliverance of Paul (and you) indicative of future results?

18:12-17, it's one thing to trust the Lord when everything's fine, but will Paul trust Him when another mob wants his blood? Eventually all the Jews who want to stop Paul grab him and bring him before Gallio, the Proconsul of Achaia. They accuse him of starting a new religion, which was against Roman law. Gallio was the younger brother of famous Stoic philosopher Seneca the Younger, who tutored Emperor Nero (in 65 A.D. Nero executed Gallio and his brother Seneca). It's amazing what the Lord does. Before Paul could open his mouth, not only does the Lord use Gallio to protect Paul, He uses this Roman proconsul to open the way for the Gospel in all of Achaia. Gallio's judgment essentially equated Judaism with Christianity. He told the Jews that their charges had nothing to do with Roman law but their own religious law, which he was not about to adjudicate. And with that Gallio drove them from his judgement seat. At which time the Gentile bystanders—taking an anti-Semitic cue from Gallio—exercise their anti-Semitism against the new leader of the synagogue, Sosthenes, who likely led the charge against Paul. But Gallio paid no attention to any of it. (Sosthenes may've later himself become a Christian, 1 Corinthians 1:1)

18:18-22, the door of the Gospel now open to all of Achaia, Paul stayed in Corinth. After a good while he sailed for home. He took Priscilla and Aquila with him and when they stopped at Cenchrea, a harbor town of Corinth, he cut off his hair, thus fulfilling a vow. The vow may've been a Nazarite vow he made to remain in Corinth after the Lord promised to keep him safe. Now that he'd left Corinth, his vow was complete, so he cut off his hair as was customary with Nazarite (or other Jewish) vows (Numbers 6:1-21; Acts 21:23-24). From there they sail to Ephesus, where Paul preached to the Jews in their synagogue. They wanted him to stay, but he had to go to Jerusalem to observe one of the feasts. Leaving Priscilla and Aquila in Ephesus, he sailed to Caesarea. From there he went *up* to Jerusalem and greeted the church. After that he went *down* to Syrian Antioch.

Do you walk by faith or sight? Life will always have its dilemmas, that's not the problem, that's life. What does it mean to walk by faith and not by sight through them (2 Corinthians 5:7)? What does it mean to trust the Lord with your life, does it mean you cross your fingers and hope for the best or does He actually give you something concrete to stand on and face your circumstances?



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III. Conclusion

When Silas and Timothy had come from Macedonia, Paul was compelled by the Spirit, and testified to the Jews that Jesus is the Christ. But when they opposed him and blasphemed, he shook his garments and said to them, "Your blood be upon your own heads; I am clean. From now on I will go to the Gentiles." And he departed from there and entered the house of a certain man named Justus, one who worshiped God, whose house was next door to the synagogue. Then Crispus, the ruler of the synagogue, believed on the Lord with all his household. And many of the Corinthians, hearing, believed and were baptized. Now the Lord spoke to Paul in the night by a vision, "Do not be afraid, but speak, and do not keep silent; for I am with you, and no one will attack you to hurt you; for I have many people in this city." And he continued there a year and six months, teaching the word of God among them.

¹ Wright, T. (2008). *Acts for Everyone, Part 2: Chapters 13-28* (pp. 105–106). London: Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge.